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ABSTRACT

This paper traces the development of parent education in America from 1700 to the present. Discussed are the emphasis, scope and organizational patterns of delivery during five periods: 1700-1850, 1850-1900, 1900-1930, 1930-1955, and 1955-present. From 1700 to 1850 information to parents generally reflected Calvinist-Evangelical philosophy. The child's moral character as an adult was the responsibility of his or her parents, whose duty it was to break the child's inherently depraved and evil will. Parent education came primarily from church leaders, pamphlet-like child rearing literature, and maternal associations. Between 1850 and 1900, the emphasis remained on moral virtue but a more nurturing tone was adopted. Information from professionals, rather than church leaders, was used by national maternal organizations that were formed in the later 1800's. From 1900 to 1930 childhood became a subject of scientific inquiry. Parent education programs were established with private and federal funding and many supplementary service organizations came into being. Because of the influence of the depression and acceptance of psychoanalytical principles, the emphasis from 1930 to 1955 was on dealing with parental self-understandings and values which could affect children. Parent education programs were increasingly implemented by government organizations. The emphasis of the last two decades has been on intervention and parent participation in a wide range of activities related to needs of children and families. The number of federally funded programs has grown dramatically. Implications for future parent education are discussed. (SB)

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HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES ON PARENT EDUCATION IN AMERICA

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The primary task of the family has always been the socialization of its children. The demands of this task, however, have changed as views toward childhood change. In response to these changes there has probably always been some form of "education" available for parents from assumed cultural traditions and over-the-fence exchanges, to more recent forms of organized parent programs.

This paper represents an attempt to trace the development of parent education in America from 1700 to the present. It is intended that such a study will lead to a better understanding of how parent education movements have responded to changing socio-cultural conditions in America. Such an understanding seems especially crucial at this time: We are moving ahead with a wide variety of approaches to parent education often with little consideration of the theoretical rationale underlying the programs of the socio-cultural conditions to which we are responding. History can not only offer insight into the approaches of the past, but also the forces we should recognize before moving ahead.

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The Approach

For purposes of comparison it is convenient to divide the history of parent education into five broad time periods: 1700-1850; 1850-1900, 1900-1930, 1930-1955 and 1955 to the present. Each period seems to reflect unique patterns which distinguish it from others. It is important to recognize, however, that the specific beginning and ending dates are somewhat arbitrary and are used to indicate general shifts in major trends.

1. the emphasis and scope of parent education
2. the organizational pattern for the delivery of parent education services.

From this discussion implications toward current and future parent educations can be made.

1700-1850

Emphasis and Scope

Attitudes, beliefs and practices related to the nature of the child in the 1700 and 1800's were primarily based upon theories and philosophies with roots in the Calvinist-Evangelical Church. The church in turn had strong influence on the writings of social moralists. Independence superimposed the additional goals of quality, opportunity, and individuality upon society's view of childhood. This spiritual, moral and political combination created an atmosphere for impassioned ideasla bout the nature of the child and strong pressures upon parents to see that the ideals were achieved. Separated from the roots of extended family systems of Europe, parents in America accepted guidance in applying the principles handed down by the "authorities". Hence, early forms of parent education began in America.

The scope and emphasis of information available to parents was in keeping with society's concept of childhood. While childhood was considered important, it was only in terms of its potential to affect later adult characteristics. There was little ambiguity either about what the desired adult characteristics would be or the methods for attaining them. Therefore, the scope of parent education was fairly narrow within the parameters set forth by Calvinist doctrine.

Since children were inherently depraved and evil, the parent's duty became one of breaking the will of the child and converting it to Godly ways. Firm discipline which affirmed parental authority was required. Constant references to spiritual says and daily prayer were also stressed in information given to parents (Cotten Mather, 1706, in Greven, 1973). An early writer of historical landmarks in parent education describes parent education during this early period as:

> "inspired by a concern with the religious and moral improvement of children. Mothers were dependent on the wisdom that might come from discussion, the inspiration of their leaders, and the strength they might get from prayer" (Gruenberg, 1928 in Bridgeman, 1930).

Additional, yet related components of information available to parents centered upon health and education in keeping with the belief that strong bodies and intelligent minds were needed to fight sin and evil. Such information was welcomed by parents in a new environment where the combination of health, education, morality and above all obedience could buffer children against high infant mortality. Concerns about mortality were considerable, particular since children were valuable economic assets to the family (Calhoun, 1945). Thus, the various maternal associations and publications of the period suggested guidelines to remedy illnesses, establish exemplary moral surroundings, educate children, and insure submission and obedience to authority.

This approach to parent education placed the major responsibility for the outcome of a child's character upon the parents. The family was called upon to fortify its members against the potential evils of the world. Failure to do so was initially the fault of the mother whose duty it was to raise the children, and ultimately the fault of the father who was responsible for both his wife and children (Faber, in Gordon, 1973). The incredible

extent of parental responsibility is described in the then popular belief that the "entire life history" of parents would be transferred to the child via "genes, germs and ideas" (Kern, 1974). In such an atmosphere parents were bombarded with pressures to lead ideal lives for their own good as well as their children. A resultant effect was the commencement of several forms for the delivery of educational services of parents.

Organizational Patterns

The organization of parent education from 1700 to 1850 was confined to structures within existing institutions: the Church, popular literature and contact with other parents. The lack of widespread or centralized organization is certainly understandable in light of the rural nature of early America.

Since much of the emphasis of parenting was affected by Calvinist teachings, church leaders became a prime source for parent education. Sermons and speeches were filled with admonitions towards parents and advice from the scriptures on children. The form of the information was dogmatic, yet abstract. The specific methods that parents could utilize in applying the concepts were not clear, leaving an impression that the parents might have had to shoulder the burdens of the difficulties of child-rearing with little actual support from the Church.

Another center for information was child-rearing literature. Several researchers indicate that during the eighteenth century specific advice was often in pamphlet type form written by philosopher-moralist, pedologists and a growing number of family doctors. (Sunley, 1955; Brim, 1965). By the early 1800's regular publications for parents were established in magazines such as Mother's Magazine, Mother's Assistant and Parent's Magazine.

A third major form of parent education was direct contact with fellow parents. The first record of planned group parent meetings is dated at 1815

in Portland, Maine. Prior to 1820 mothers in many parts of the country met informally in study groups called "maternal associations" to discuss child-rearing concerns (Sunley, in Mead 1955). Such meetings were locally based in growing city areas where there was a growing body of middle-class families and where prominent women in the community or local missionary wives assumed leadership roles (Brim, 1965). Numbers were small, however, and no effort was made to organize the local groups in some central manner.

The approach to delivering parent education in each of the three major organizing forces was didatic and dictatorial. There was a right way to raise children, and preachers, writers and leading mothers felt it was their obligation as Christian citizens to communicate these ideas to the public in general.

The forms of organized parent education between 1700 and 1850 may therefore have directly affected only a small proportion of the population. With growing urbanization, new life style patterns and changing theories and philosophies about the nature of childhood, parent education would soon undergo rapid change and expansion.

1850-1900

Emphasis and Scope of Parent Education

Changing concepts of childhood opened the role of parents beyond that of spiritual and moral training. The child nurture movement which grew between 1850 and 1870 sought to help parents meet their new demands. Its representatives advocated pursuasion, consistency, firmness, understanding and encouragement, adjusted to the needs of the individual child (Sunley, in Mead, 1955). Thus the scope of parent education moved from minute prescriptions to general and gentle principles which could be applied in a variety of situations.

Concerns with management or discipline were still a major theme in popular books such as Abbott's Young Christian (1852) or Bushnell's Christian Nurture (1867). The goals of traditional uprightness of character and pious faith also remained. What had changed was the methods for achieving these goals, and here is basically where the problems for parents arose. Theories and philosophies urged parents to maintain their authority over children, but without anger or physical punishment. The spontaneity and exuberance of childhood, so admired by the romantics, was not to be destroyed; nevertheless, the child was expected to behave in socially acceptable ways.

Organizational Patterns

By 1850 disillusionment with religion had weakened the churches role as an organizing medium for parent education. After the 1800's the study of the child came rapidly under the domain of the "professional". Investigations of child development launched the publications of overwhelming information from diverse disciplines - from philosophy and religion to physiology, neurology, and even physics. The information they provided became more and more technical and the interdisciplinary nature of early child study lacked central "clearinghouses" which could organize and synthesize reports and findings. The early efforts of leaders such as G. Stanley Hall in gathering together conferences and organizations for child study interests met with failure. People were protective of their ideas and various schools vied for positions of influence rather than seeking to join forces.

Although Hall's efforts did not affect action among the experts, he was able to reach the lay public. In 1888 a group of eight New York mothers welcomed his ideas and organized regular child-study groups. By 1890 the group had expanded to thirty-five and had adopted the official name The Society for the Study of Child Nature, later to become the Child Study

Association of America. Other groups followed, including the National Congress of Mothers in 1897 which in 1907 became the National Congress of Parents and Teachers (Bridgeman, 1930; Brim, 1956).

The enthusiasm of the members of these early organizations for the importance of their work was clear:

> "even now the child is, as a rule, an object of scientific study observation only; while we study it as a human being, giving attention to those manifestations of traits of character that are open to the observation of the mother. . .
> (Child Study Reports, 1890-1895, Wishy, 1968)

Early organized parent education groups, while growing, served only a small segment of the population. Members were generally well educated upper-middle class, and residents of city areas (Bridgeman, 1930). Their work remained at a sophisticated level, often discussing theoretical issues rather than the application of the concepts to real situations.

Magazines such as Ladies Home Journal, Parents' Magazine, McCall's and local newspapers provided literature for a middle class audience. Social workers and kindergarten teachers in inner city slums tried to establish working relationships with lower-class parents which often include parent education functions. Clearly, however, the more education sought and received the majority of the information.

From these beginnings a rapid expansion and diffusion of services resulted, with interdisciplinary centers of interest and with a variety of approaches.

1900-1930

Emphasis and Scope

Parent education programs expanded greatly between 1900 and 1930 with the twenties being a time of particularly rapid development. The view of childhood as a subject of scientific inquiry moved parenting to a far more

rationale sphere. Parent education programs sought to communicate and apply the findings of research to every day concerns. Commensurate with the prevalent theories and philosophies about childhood, the development of various individual components of the child became the center of concern. Parents sought to improve their skill in child-rearing by learning information about the child. This approach to parent education was rather technical and simplistic.

A major problem inherent within defining the scope of parent education can be understood in terms of the parent's perspective. Confronted with many social changes and a diffuse body of abstract scientific writings on child development, parents wanted help. Understanding neither their life changes or the literature, parents were unable to identify their needs. Experts did little to help for theories and philosophies of child development tended to converse upon isolated interests. Disciplines outside psychology and child development were also joining the bandwagon, only to further segment the child.

The emphasis was centered upon the child. It was up to the parent to meet the child's needs, putting their own personal needs aside in keeping with the view that childhood was the most critical period in human development. The purpose was often directed at learning to apply specific aspects of scientific knowledge to the care of their children.

Organizational Patterns

The organization of parent education continued to combine the expertise of actual parents and professionals in the field of child study as well as education, medicine, religion, psychology, social work, etc. Three major directions were taken in extending parent education.

One thrust was in the growth of organization established just before the turn of the century. The Child Study Association of America was particu-

larly active. In 1918 an important source of funding for organizations concerned with child development and parent education was started: the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial. During its twenty year history the Spelman Fund financed a comprehensive group of programs which established a nation-wide system of child study and parent education programs.

A second direction in parent education was the emergence of federal support. The 1909 White House Conference on Children served to highlight the problems of the nation's children and the importance of parent education within this picutre. From these beginnings legislation aided parent education: In 1914 the Smith-Level Act provided for home demonstration agents in areas of child care and in 1917 the Smith Hughes Act defined homemaking tasks as a basic vocation for women, thus making available training funds and establishing programs at land-grant universities. By the middle of the 1920's states assumed an active supporting role and established departments of child development and parent education or based these functions within existing departments such as vocational education. Soon public school systems also centered the area by offering courses in child care. This latter development was especially helpful in bringing available information to all economic levels.

A third dimension of parent education was assumed by numerous organizations whose purposes, although not focused on parent education, provided valuable supplementary services. For example, the American Home Economics Association, founded in 1908 originally emphasized dietary concerns, but later became quite active in areas concerned with family and child care education. Similarly, the National Committee on Mental Hygiene, the Committee on Marriage and the Home within the Federal Council of Churches of Christ, the National Research Council's Committee on Child Development and the National

Congress of Parents and Teachers were among the agencies which attended to parent education concerns in aspects of their total program. (Brim, 1965) Nursery Schools also provided valuable services to parents as part of their total program for the preschool child. Most notably were the parent cooperative nursery schools first started in 1916 at the University of Chicago (Brim, 1965).

By 1925 it had become obvious to major organizations such as the Spelman Memorial and the Child Study Association of America that the common services of private and public organizations involved in parent education required some coordination. Following two conferences of parent educators, the National Council of Parent Education was founded in 1925

> "as a clearinghouse for participating agencies and to promote affiliation between adult education and child welfare groups and to serve as a coordinating and consulting service for organizations interested in parent education". (Fisher, 1933)

No attempt was made to centralize services of the more than seventy member organizations, but rather disseminate knowledge through the member agencies. The loose organizational network of parent education facilitated the use of a variety of dissemination methods. Considering the dramatic growth experienced primarily during the ten year period between 1920 and 1930, it is unfortunate that similar gains could not have been made in the following decades.

1930-1955

Emphasis - Scope

The widespread growth on parent education of the 1920's leveled off with the onset of economic depression. New concerns, new organizations and new audiences evolved between 1930 and 1955.

The widened, more dynamic view of childhood which grew from psychoanalytic ideas changed the focus of parent education to a preventative role and the emphasis from the child to the family (Gruenberg, 1940). Parent education assumed that the problems of children had their origin as much in the personality difficulties of the parent as their lack of knowledge about the nature of the child. This implied that parents must examine their personal self-understandings and value systems.

Influential writings of the period provided important information for parents. Most notable were the works of Spock and Gesell. Study of trends in child care information noted a shift from dogmatic advice giving to a suggestive mode where alternatives are explored. Actual parent education meetings likewise shifted from earlier lecture approaches to participatory methods such as study and discussion groups, directed observation in laboratory schools and guided conversations (Carter, 1938).

Organizational Patterns

Between 1930 and 1938 parent education programs increasingly were implemented by government organizations. The activities on the Works Progress Administration (WPA) made available an expanded number of trained professional and lay leaders concerned with child and family needs. Part of the success of these WPA programs can be attributed to its administrative structure. While funds originated in the federal government, program planning remained on the state and local level (Carter, 1938). This approach continued the earlier democratic base of parent education, thus better serving the needs of parents and families. The WPA also served to move the field of parent education into low income groups. This shift was critical in expanding the content, to widened issues on family and social concern.

After World War II parent education programs declined. Several factors contributed to this decline: the demise of the National Council of Parent Education, lack of funds for professional activities with the end of the

Spelman Fund in 1938, the absence of clearinghouse types of publications. Perhaps an additional factor, especially during the early 1950's was the prevalence of psycho-analytic views toward parenthood which evoked a sense of guilt when failures in child-rearing occurred. Recovery from an extended period of economic chaos and prolonged war was also slow. Events would in 1956 perpetuate a rise in interest and activity.

1955-Present

Emphasis and Scope

The past two decades have witnessed a new surge of interest and expansion in parent education. As concern for academic learning and cultural deprivation focused attention on the stimulation of development during the early years, parent education moved toward a strong intervention role. Within the total thrust of the War on Poverty of the 1960's parents were seen as prime agents to effect change.

The scope of parent education programs has never been so varied and so broad. With an increased concern for the economically disadvantaged, the concept of parent education has moved to a broader base of "parent participation". Thus, in addition to focusing on child development, programs include opportunities to learn and participate in a wide range of community, social and political activities which relate to the needs of children and families.

This type of program appears to be the most efficient and effective way of using public resources for long-term public welfare. Prior decades had recognized the interface between economic well-being and social, emotional and physical functioning, but programs had tended to provide services for families rather than help families provide them better for themselves. The objective of recent trends is to make parents active and informed decision-makers, rather than interfere or usurp the role of parents in the child-rearing process.

The emphasis of parent education has moved far beyond the technical, skill oriented style of the 1920's or the mental health, preventive focus of the 1940's. Processes are emphasized now over content. Operationally, this has meant an increase in programs which utilize group dynamics discussion techniques (Auerbach, 1968) and direct participation in children's programs. Content is selected in accordance with parent's needs and interests. Such an approach is also needed in the pluralism of American childrearing. The value of maintaining the character of various cultural groups has been widely recognized today.

The changes in the audience to whom parent education is directed has had great impact on the emphasis of programs. In addition to its focus on low income groups, pre-parent audiences are increasingly sought in elementary and secondary schools and youth groups. The emphasis has been an appreciation of human development and an understanding of one's own relationships, particularly with children. Direct approaches including courses in child development, family life or psychology and indirect methods which attend to over-all human relationships throughout the school program are being tried.

Changing awareness of male and female roles in society has made fathers increasingly involved in parent education. Attendance figures in all programs indicate, however, thatthe mother continues to be viewed as the prime socializer of children (Lazar and Chapman, 1972).

Organizational Patterns

Dramatic growth in the federal sphere has placed much of parent education under government sponsorship. Diversity and overlap of services is difficult to control since there is no agency charged with the responsibility of coordinating parent education. Instead parent programs are one aspect of the focus on many offices: National Institute for Mental Health, the Office of Child Development, Social Security, the Office of Equal Opportunity, the

Office of Education, Vocational Education, the Bureau for the Education of the Handicapped, to mention a few. Under these agencies the range of programs are numerous from home-based programs like Home Start, to Head Start, Parent-Child Centers, high school child development programs such as "Exploring Childhood", and Health Start. This organizational smorgasboard raises many issues for consideration in future directions for parent education.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE OF PARENT EDUCATION

The field of parent education is approaching a century of organized operation in America. Still, much work and many unanswered questions face both researchers and practitioners in the field.

One major question concerns the lack of a theory of parenting. Parent education from the time of its first organized beginnings has lacked a theoretical structure of its own. Parenting as an area of study borrows and applies theories and philosophies from other areas. As we progress in research in the area of parent-child relationships it is increasingly becoming evident that meaningful constructs of parenting are being found which could well be incorporated into theoretical structure. Such a foundation could better guide future research efforts. Likewise, program development could more consistently and effectively help parents face the challenge of child rearing in the future.

This leads us to consider an additional question concerning the interdisciplinary nature of parent education. The scope of parent education has only increased over time and the organizational patterns become increasingly complex. Researchers and practitioners from many fields are involved in parent education. The lack of coordinating body, such as the former National Council on Parent Education, has meant the lack of a clearinghouse or synthesizing function. Program efforts are duplicated and research

findings are not widely communicated. Even with the role of government as a funding body, there is little coordination. Programs are administered by many officers, often in completely different branches of government. A mechanism is required to facilitate coordination and synthesis. A center which could serve to effectively bring together private and public programs needs to be investigated. State level bodies might be most effective, for serving to centralize services while individual variations can be tried out in various states in order to establish successful variations.

A third area we must question are the assumptions which underlie our goals for parent education. The very nature of parent education often implies assumptions which generally are avoided to by-pass controversy. These assumptions include: (1) we know what a good parent is, (2) parents are not presently competent and (3) educational techniques can improve a parent's role performance. By ignoring the implications of these assumptions, parent education programs have tended to fail to state specific goals, objectives and rationales for their programs. Without these program development and evaluation cannot be adequately accomplished.

The question of our methods also needs to be raised. Throughout history, a variety of methods have been utilized to educate parents. Today this variety has increased with expanded use of communication media. But regardless of the media used, the significant question of the teaching model remains. Didactic methods, inquiry approaches, group dynamics, guided participation are some of the popular alternatives. Which are most effective? When are they most effective? Is there a "matching" factor to consider between the type of parent or the content? What is the cost-benefit of various methods?

A fifth question addresses the issue of program content. With so many values and practices of child-rearing, content decisions are difficult.

Often decisions are based on the training of the leader or orientation of the program developers. Are these the content needs of the parents participating in the programs? As needs vary among parents, how can programs be adapted? The processes used in selecting relevant content must be studied.

The question of who are our parent educators and how are they trained has plagued the field of parent education from its beginnings. What types of knowledge and skills are needed? Are there personal qualities which should also be required? The present lack of comprehensive guidelines indicates that much work lies ahead.

Finally, and most significantly, we must question the effects of parent education on parents and children. A wide range of potential effects can be considered from I.Q. gains and better health in children, to enhanced self-esteem and parental role performance in parents. The future impact of parent education depends on information of this kind to document its effectiveness.

In conclusion, historical perspectives on parent education provide a sense of hope, and yet a measure of depression for the future. Hope, because we hear so many people identifying parent education as "the way to go" and depression, because they have been saying it for so long.

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